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FROM THE AMBASSADOR FOR EAP A/S HILL

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [OTRA](#) [VM](#)

SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR EAP ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHRISTOPHER HILL

Introduction

¶1. (SBU) Mission Vietnam looks forward to welcoming you back to Hanoi May 23-24. Your visit will be a key event in the lead-up to the June visit to Washington by President Nguyen Minh Triet. Indeed, I expect your visit to prove instrumental in determining the success of that visit by underscoring top-level USG concern over human rights and in focusing minds here on what Vietnam will need to do to ensure the Triet visit has a positive impact on the relationship.

¶2. (SBU) A series of high-level bilateral visits over the past two years, including those of President Bush, former Prime Minister Phan Van Khai and DPM/FM Khiem, have helped push the bilateral relationship to a "higher plane." Vietnam's desire to expand its access to U.S. markets, successfully host APEC and accede to the WTO also helped materially strengthen bilateral ties. Our improved relations with Vietnam is clearly in the U.S. national interest. At present, Vietnam is in many ways a singular success story for U.S. diplomacy in Southeast Asia.

¶3. (SBU) Vietnam's motivation to seek stronger ties is clear. Hanoi increasingly sees the United States as an important force in maintaining a stable regional environment and balancing against China. Key decision makers here have also been convinced that the United States a critical source of financial and technical assistance, and a huge market for Vietnamese goods, both of which are underpinning the nation's enviably high rate of economic growth.

¶4. (SBU) We have separately reported via classified channels on the current human rights crackdown. It is clear that the Vietnamese have dug a deep hole for themselves by arresting, then publicly demonizing, peaceful activists. Some here are hopeful that the strong negative international reaction will help spark a debate over Vietnam's future which actually could lead, over time, to positive change. A recent statement by former Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet on the need for the regime to "engage" dissidents, in particular, heartens the moderates. However, there will be no sea change over the coming weeks. This fact alone ensures that human rights will continue to have a negative impact on our relationship, and by extension on the Triet visit. Using this visit to strengthen prospects for continued improvement in governance would be one way to offset the fallout from the crackdown. I believe this is possible.

¶5. (SBU) During your visit, we hope you will:

-- acknowledge GVN progress in expanding the space for religious belief, but stress that the USG is deeply concerned about the ongoing crackdown on political dissent and that the deteriorating human rights situation is diverting attention from other areas of mutual interest;

-- stress that we should not miss the opportunity to use President Triet's visit to advance our bilateral relationship, in particular by explicitly confirming our joint resolve to continue, and deepen, ongoing programs of technical assistance across the board. The Vietnamese should embrace continued programming in the field of rule of law and governance, as well as the implementation of trade agreements and new cooperative ventures like the Peace Corps;

-- express USG support for concluding a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA), and point out that we are dedicated to helping Vietnam develop better protection of intellectual property rights;

-- applaud our strong cooperation in a number of areas, such as the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS and Avian Influenza and defense issues, and urge further bilateral efforts to combat transnational problems such as money laundering;

-- suggest that Vietnam's efforts to take a more active role on the world stage, including its aspirations to join the UNSC and to take on a greater leadership role in ASEAN, mean that Hanoi will have to start taking stands on issues of global concern such as Burma, Iran and North Korea;

-- thank the GVN for its cooperation in the fullest possible accounting of missing American personnel.

President Triet's visit

16. (SBU) We have made clear to our contacts that any decisions related to protocol and other arrangements for President Triet's visit belong to the White House, but your interlocutors likely press you for a visit with all the "bells and whistles," including a stay in Blair House. Your interlocutors will also likely discuss their

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desire for a Joint Statement - to the Vietnamese, a sine qua non of any high-level successful overseas trip. We believe that such Joint Statements, while often difficult to negotiate, are useful in extracting and honoring commitments, such as those mentioned above.

17. (SBU) Before former Prime Minister Phan Van Khai's visit to the United States in the summer of 2005, the Vietnamese bureaucracy was ordered to be proactive in reaching a number of agreements with the United States. We experienced a similar "focus on deliverables" in advance of President Bush's visit here last November. We have heard that Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung has recently given the word that the GVN should act now to make President Triet's visit a success and ordered Vietnamese officials to take appropriate steps. We hope you will stress to your interlocutors the need to take action now to ensure that various draft agreements and initiatives before us are completed in time for the visit.

18. (SBU) For example, we have held talks with the Vietnamese since before APEC over establishing a Peace Corps program, purchasing land for a new Embassy and concluding a Boeing 787 purchase as well as power plant deals with AES and Gannon, and a port development project with SSA Marine. Each of these big ticket deals would significantly improve our balance of trade with Vietnam (currently running nearly nine to one in Vietnam's favor.) In addition, for almost ten years we have urged the Vietnamese to formally accept Congen Ho Chi Minh City's consular district and, more recently, we have discussed adding consulates in each other's country. Top level guidance, similar to what we experienced prior to PM Khai's visit to the United States, is needed to close out these complicated issues. Reinforcing to your interlocutors that reaching agreement in these and other areas will help ensure that Triet's visit will be a substantive and symbolic success likely will help prompt leaders here to push for the necessary action.

Human Rights

19. (SBU) As you know, we have repeatedly expressed our strong concerns and stressed to our senior and working-level interlocutors

that Vietnamese actions to suppress dissent are damaging to Vietnam's national interests. We also have greatly stepped up our diplomatic efforts by pointing out to contacts, and through a variety of media, that imprisoning people for merely expressing their political views and labeling political dissidents "terrorists" is injurious to relations with the United States.

¶10. (SBU) Senator Patrick Leahy recently wrote to President Triet and suggested greater bilateral cooperation in the areas of good governance, anti-corruption and rule of law. Senator Leahy's views reflect those of a number of senior lawmakers, many of whom have been strong supporters of engagement through programs of capacity building, technical assistance and exchanges. We believe that the Triet visit could provide a good opportunity to extract explicit GVN buy-in towards greater cooperation in these areas that are complementary to our "transformational" efforts here. By ensuring that any Joint Statement or other public remarks underscore our shared commitment to further engagement on these issues, we can frustrate efforts of those in Vietnam intent on torpedoing the deepening U.S.-Vietnam relationship.

Religious Freedom

¶11. (SBU) In spite of the arguments of some linking the recent crackdown on dissidents to a rollback of progress on religious freedom, we can unambiguously state that religious freedoms for Vietnam's people continue to improve. This progress has included: registering and recognizing a number of churches, congregations and denominations; freeing all the individuals whom we believed were imprisoned for religious reasons; and, promulgating and implementing a new framework on religion. Some previously troublesome provincial areas, such as the Central and Northwest Highlands, have also showed distinct signs of improvement. For example, Christmas services were reported to have gone well in these two areas. I strongly believe that the evidence here continues to support Washington's decision last year to list Country of Particular Concern status for Vietnam. Your visit can serve to underscore the importance of Vietnam staying the course in this regard.

TIFA/TEXTILES/IPR

¶12. (SBU) Since mid-March of this year, the United States and Vietnam have been negotiating a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA), with the aim of having a signing event during the Triet visit. Under the TIFA work plan, USTR has proposed discussing such issues as the protection of intellectual property rights (IPR), implementation of Vietnam's WTO commitments and other means to liberalize and facilitate greater trade and investment. A TIFA is a necessary step towards Vietnam's hoped for participation in the

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Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) Program, and we may have a TIFA deal by the time you arrive.

¶13. (SBU) You probably will hear complaints from your interlocutors or American business representatives about the Department of Commerce (DOC) Textile and Apparel Import Monitoring Mechanism. They may argue that this mechanism violates the WTO principle of non-discrimination and has had a negative impact on trade. Key interlocutors here know that the Department of Commerce is working to develop the mechanism in a manner that is as transparent as possible and has minimal impact on trade. Commerce has, and will continue to, seek input and comments from all interested parties.

¶14. (SBU) One area of particular concern with Vietnam is intellectual property rights (IPR) protection. USTR has decided to maintain Vietnam's listing on its Special 301 "Watch List" for 2007. USTR recognized Vietnam's strong efforts to develop an effective IPR legal regime, but enforcement remains weak. We already have provided Vietnam with scores of training and technical assistance programs to improve IPR enforcement and protection. You may wish to point out that the United States remains committed to helping Vietnam strengthen its legal system and enforcement efforts; we are currently working with the GVN on a Letter of Agreement that will

hopefully enable INL to work with Vietnamese Customs on IPR protection. Provided we complete this in time, this could be another Triet visit deliverable.

Health/Environmental Cooperation

¶15. (SBU) Our cooperative efforts to prevent and treat HIV/AIDS and Avian Influenza are hallmarks of the bilateral relationship, and we hope you will applaud the GVN for the positive steps it has taken to address these issues and work closely with us. GVN officials likely will offer thanks for USG support and seek further assistance. Leaders here understand the significance of the USD \$400,000 in assistance we have provided to help start the clean up Danang airport's dioxin contamination, but they will press for more assistance for victims of dioxin. The need for a better understanding of the science remains, but we are working to find acceptable and appropriate ways to deal with this issue, including by cooperating with organizations outside the USG. We remain hopeful that USD two million in ESF for dioxin-related programming that was in the recently vetoed supplement appropriations bill will in the next version.

Defense and Security Cooperation

¶16. (SBU) The Vietnamese are proceeding at a measured pace toward more mil-mil cooperation. Pacific Fleet Commander Roughhead was recently in Vietnam to talk about expanding this cooperation, including in areas such as search and rescue, naval medicine and meteorological information exchanges. Under the International Military Education and Training (IMET) Program, two Vietnamese officers recently completed English language training in the United States. They will be instructors in the language lab we intend to provide this year. The GVN sees this program as an important part of its preparations for participation, at some point in the future, in peacekeeping operations.

¶17. (SBU) As for security assistance, the GVN has voiced enthusiasm about the possibility of purchasing from us non-lethal military equipment, but are already seeking to move beyond that to more high-tech, lethal equipment. We have urged the Vietnamese to take a step-by-step approach, with a focus on spare parts that could be used in search and rescue equipment. To move forward, we first need from the Vietnamese an official Letter of Request. A quick reminder from you in this regard would be helpful.

¶18. (SBU) In other areas, we have a nascent nonproliferation cooperation program, which primarily comprises building capacity among Vietnamese officials. The Vietnamese for the first time sent observers to a PSI event in New Zealand, and we and other countries continue to try to persuade them to sign the Statement of Interdiction Principles. In contrast, our law enforcement cooperation, which primarily consists of training and working-level exchanges, could be deeper, and we continue to strive for greater operational cooperation in the future.

Money Laundering

¶19. (SBU) During DPM/FM Khiem's visit to Washington, DEA/DOJ pushed for the GVN to revise its Anti-Money Laundering (AML) Decree to meet U.S. standards and improve law enforcement cooperation. We hope you hit home this message again. Vietnam also needs to become a member of the Asia Pacific Group and its regional Financial Action Task Force (FATF). FATF membership would be an important signal to the international financial community. As Vietnam seeks to take a

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leadership role in the international community and join the UNSC in coming years, membership in FATF would signal both the maturity of its banking system and the prudence of its leadership.

Vietnam's International Profile

¶20. (SBU) Vietnam is seeking to join the UNSC as a non-permanent member for the 2008-2009 term, and your interlocutors will likely ask you for the USG's support. While we have been non-committal, we made clear that with a stronger international role also comes a responsibility to take a stand on certain issues of global concern. To date, Vietnam has not yet spoken out about Iran, Burma or North Korea, and we have been encouraging the GVN to stake out a more proactive stance on these and other matters. In this regard, the GVN's (relatively) critical statement of the DPRK's nuclear test last October was a welcome step in the right direction.

Fulllest Possible Accounting

¶21. (SBU) We continue to enjoy good cooperation with the Vietnamese in the fullest possible accounting of our personnel missing from the war, but there are a number of issues in which we would like to see more progress, including underwater recovery operations (we have approval but were unable to complete arrangements for a ship visit this spring) and archival access. We would appreciate if you could thank your interlocutors for Vietnam's continued cooperation to date and express the USG's hope for further assistance in the future.

A Word on China

¶22. (SBU) I will speak more with you here in Hanoi, but it is worth noting that President Triet is in Beijing as we transmit this message. The China dynamic is of obvious importance to Vietnam, and there is an understandable competitive flavor to Hanoi's ties to Beijing and Washington. Far from trying to manipulate its two huge "partners," however, Vietnam -- understanding its relative power -- seeks to balance its ties with each. With recent heightened tensions with China over sovereignty issues, and with us over human rights, Hanoi's task is at present not an easy one.

Conclusion

¶23. (SBU) Again, we warmly welcome your visit. It will prove critical in shaping Vietnam's attitude and approach to their President's trip to Washington and thus the future course of bilateral relations.

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